



NATIONAL MOVEMENT IN ANDHRA: A CULTURAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Culture plays an important role in creating a Nation's consciousness. Indian culture has a hoary past and inspiring ideas and ideals. From the ages people united with the same ideals through out India. The national awakening in the 19th and 20th century also popularized our cultural past. The preaching of Swami Vivekananda and Dayananda Saraswati, who propagated the idea of superiority of Vedas is the best example of this scenario which imbibed self respect in the Indians. In the light of colonial era, when freedom struggle started, the leaders took the same ideals from our culture to spread the movement amongst the common people. Celebrating festivals, recitation of purānas, observing fastings, singing bhajans, samkeertanas, prabhātabheris are a part of Andhra culture. Hence an attempt is made to study how these cultural aspects were applied to motivate the Telugu people in the National movement.

KEYWORDS: Culture, Andhra, Jihad, Swadeshi, Vandemataram, Rakshabandhan, Swaraj, Khaddar, Mahabhinishkramanam

INTRODUCTION

The British rule over India made the country degenerate in all fields including the Culture and traditions. The common folk of that period was illiterates and had no knowledge in the political matters and were deprived of their rights. So the leaders of the early phase led the freedom movement on their own shoulders without the participation of the common people. As a result freedom struggle was confined to educated community only which could not bring fruits. The leaders of the second phase by observing the situation believed that the participation of the common folk is necessary in the freedom struggle to get the result. So the leaders utilized every aspect of our culture to bring awareness among the common people. By comparing the British as demons in our puranic stories like Hiranya kasipa, Ravana etc., by celebrating Ganesh Chaturthi, Sivaji coronation ceremony, *Nadi Pushkarams*, *Samkeertanas* and *Harikathas* they made people mobilize in the freedom struggle. Let's examine the cultural aspect of the freedom movement in Andhra during different phases.

The first war of Independence: The year 1857 witnessed the first out burst of the unrest against the British in a large scale in the history of India. The great revolt often regarded as the first war of independence that almost brought an end to the British rule. The revolt was very intensive in North India. When the first war of independence started in 1857CE, it is stated that the sepoys circulated the information among themselves with lotuses which considered as auspicious in Hinduism.

Andhra in 1857 revolt: In the Andhra region, though not much impact was seen, some minor incidents took place in towns like Kadapa, Machilipatnam and Vishakhapatnam. At Kadapa, Shaik Peer Saheb preached *Jihad* against the British on 28 August 1857² and made a call to all the Muslims to revolt against the British. It was also reported that the Muslims of that town offered prayers in the mosques for the success of the then Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Jafar II.³ The posters at Hyderabad in Nizam state read like this.

“The aid of the Almighty and his Prophet is present with Afzal-

ud-Dowla Bahadur who should not fear and be apprehensive. If fearful he should wear bangles and sit at home” further says that “If after reading this paper, a representation is not made to the king Nizam or his Diwan, the oath of the swine is on him and if in case of a Hindu the oath of a cow”⁴ Here in this statement the agitator clearly provokes the males who will not come out to fight against the British to wear bangles, wearing bangles is a taboo for men in Indian culture. Cow is a sacred and swine is hatred animal in Hindu and Islam cultures respectively. So he gave the oath of these animals to provoke the people and another point is that he believes in the unity of these two classes. The oath of cow and swine was seen in many of the inscriptions also from medieval period of India.

At Visakhapatnam, a Telugu placard was found urging the Muslims of the town to raze the town to dust and re-name it Muhammadpatnam during the Moharram, which is Muslims holy month.⁵

Vandemataram Movement: With the partition of Bengal in 1905, the freedom struggle of the country took a new turn. Lord Curzon announced the partition of Bengal in 1905 for administrative purpose. Bengal was centre of patriotic activities at that time. So to control these feelings Curzon adopted the policy of Divide and rule and bifurcated Bengal state in to East Bengal where Muslim population was more against Hindus and West Bengal where in Hindu population was higher than Muslims.(Bipan Chandra p.24) The partition was came in to practice in the month of *Sravana* when the festival of Rakshabandhan takes place. Tagore sent out a call for people to use the festival to strengthen the concept of unity and brotherhood⁶. Tagore transformed the religious tradition to a political motif. On October 16, the day of partition was observed as Rakshabandhan by tying Rakhis to each other and took bath in Ganga river. All these age old traditions were framed to get the attention of people against the British policy.

In Bengal, under Surendranath Banarjee, a strong movement was launched to pressurize the Government to withdraw the partition. The movement was popularly known as the

Vandemataram movement or swadeshi movement. New leaders like Bala Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajapati Roy and Bipin Chandra Pal led this movement. The entire country reverberated with the cries of *Vandemataram*, the immortal hymn of the mother land, composed by the Bengali writer Bankim Chandra Chatterji. Picketing of shops and bonfire of foreign goods became order of the day.

The Andhra politics, during the years 1906-1911, was shaped by the *Vandemataram* Movement and its ideals. In 1906, Nyapathi Subbarao and K. Venkata ramana Rao advocated to popularize *Swadeshi* Movement in Andhra. In Kurnool, subscriptions were collected to send a student to Japan to learn glass making.⁷ The arrest of Surendranath Banerji in 1906 at Barisal in Bengal created great commotion in the country. In Andhra towns like Rajahmundry, Kakinada, Vijayanagaram and Gooty protest meetings were held. It was that meeting that made the slogan *Vandemataram- Manade Rajyam* (*Vandemataram- Ours is state*). *Vandemataram* became popular in Andhra.

Bipin Chandra Pal's Tour in Andhra: The *Vandemataram* movement received great impetus in Andhra when Bipin Chandrapal toured Andhra in April 1907. The tour was organised by Mutnuri Krishnarao, the editor of Krishna Patrika. Pal first visited Vijayanagaram and Visakhapattanam. But he did not make any impact on the people of these towns when he spoke about national politics. He next visited Kakinada on the 17th and delivered two lectures on Vedeanta and Swaraj. He said our Vedanta preaches that 'everyone whom we see around us is a manifestation of god' and 'If everyone in India accordingly shapes his life and realizes god to himself, this land which was ones highly spiritual will it convey a message of peace to other nations'. He spoke of swaraj as national ideal and boycott as the instrument of achieving it. The idea of swaraj is to spiritualized the secular activities of life.⁸

Pal's next visit was arranged in Rajamundry from 19-24 April and delivered five lectures. He received a tremendous ovation at that place, which is the cultural centre of Andhra. The youth of town founded an association called '*Balabharati samiti*' to promote the swadeshi movement. The members of the *Balabharati samiti* made a big procession on the occasion of '*Mahashiva rātri*' and went to kotilingala, where a meeting was arranged there on the river bank of Godavari. Gadicharla Harisarvottamarao, Chilukuri Veerabhararao who were the students of Rajamundry arts college delivered speeches in that meeting. Pal delivered speech on *swadeshi* movement, boycott of foreign goods and Bhrahmasamaj which received a great ovation. A play was written by Kavi Raju named "Rana Pratap," inspired by Bipin Chandra Pal, which infuriated the British because of its patriotic content.⁹

Chilakamarti Lakshminarasimham translated Pal's lectures in Telugu in the following poem.

Bharatakhandaambu Chakkani pādiyāvu
Hinduvulu lēgadūdalai yēdechuchunda
Tellavāranu gadasari gollavāru
Pitukuchunnāru mūtulu bigiyagatti.

(India is a milch cow and Indians are calves deprived of their due share of the milk by the cunning white men whom he compared to a subtle cowherd and he says, "though the country is rich the people are dying due to starvation")¹⁰

Next he moved to Vijayawada where he addressed on *vedanta* and message of freedom and proceeded to Machilipattanam where he spoke on *swadeshi* - boycott, National education and

swaraj. In his last lecture on the *mātrumurthi*, he explained the origin and the meaning of *Vandemataram* and the esoteric meaning of the worship of Kali and Durga. He concluded his speech with a stirring appeal for funds in aid of the Andhra National educational committee.

This visit instilled strong national sentiment among the people of Andhra and every boy used to wish *Vandemataram* to each other.

Home Rule Movement;

Balagangadhar Tilak and Anniebesant started Home rule movement in 1916 separately. Gadicharla Harisarvottamarao, a follower of Anniebesant printed pamphlets and translated a poem 'Awake mother' written by Smt. Sarojini Naidu in to Telugu '*Nūtana haindava mātru geetam*'. *Swarajya paramoddesham* (Ideal of Swarajya) and *swatantrya paridana patram* which spoke of the consciousness of India.

Gandhi - Non-cooperation:

The years 1921-31 constitute a most glorious and heroic chapter in the history of freedom struggle in Andhra. During these years, the Andhras followed Gandhiji's leadership meticulously and made splendid sacrifices for the freedom of the country. The Telugu leaders compared Gandhiji as lord Srikrishna and is instructing Indians to fight for dharma like Arjuna in the Mahabharata war. The leaders preached that they waged a righteous war against the British, who economically and politically crushing the Indians. Inspiring leadership was provided by eminent men like *Desha Bhakta* Kondavemkatappaya *Andhraratna* Duggirala Gopalakrishnayya, *Andhrakesari* Tanguturi Prakasam, *Desoddaraka* Kasinathuni Nageswararao etc.,

Non-cooperation movement headed by Mohandas karamchand Gandhi was based on the ancient Hindu concept that 'cooperation with evil is sinful' and its removal is possible by means of nonviolence. In other words Gandhi wanted to emphasize that movement was non an ordinary political struggle to get rid of the alien rule in country, but one that was based on higher principles of morality aimed at bringing a feeling of remorse in the minds of the rulers. The movement consisted of

1. Programme of boycott
2. Constructive programme and
3. Civil disobedience movement.

The programme of boycott was widely welcomed by the Andhras. The AICC met at Vijayawada on 31, march and 1, April, 1921. Thousands of people from all over the Telugu districts in the Madras presidency attended this session to have a *darshan* of Gandhiji. The songs are composed to welcome Gandhiji in which Gandhiji was praised as *puranik* hero. The A. I.C.C session was held at, what is now called, Gandhinagar, which is in those days was an open place with some thorny bushes here and there.¹¹

The kesari samajam of Rajamundry welcomed Gandhiji with the song "*Gandhi mahatmuniki dandālu dandālu Bharatamāta*". (salutes to Mahatma Gandhi) and another group from Ramachandrapuram praised Gandhiji "*Mahatma Gandhi darshaname punyamu*". (seeing Gandhiji will give merit) Another song "*Mamu brova mahini velasitiva Mahatma gandhi*". (Gandhi born to save us). People came forward with their contributions to the 'Tilak Swaraj Fund' wherever he went and women came forward to donate their jewellery. One of the first women who came forward to donate all her jewellery to discard foreign clothes and wear Khaddar was Maganti Annapurnamma. Another remarkable incident that happened

was of Yamini Purna Tilakam, a lady belonging to the professional dancing community. Under the impact of Gandhiji's personality she gave up her profession and dedicated her life to the cause of the Non-Co-operation Movement and India's independence.¹² This incident was described as 'the response of Amrapali, a courtesan in the court of Ajatha satru to the call of the Buddha' who renounced all her wealth and accepted Buddhism.¹³

Khadi As A Symbol Of Swarajya:

The freedom movement breathed new life into native arts and culture, reclaiming them as symbols of self reliance and national pride. *Khādi* became an emblem of resistance, empowering individuals and transforming them in to assertion and nationalism. Dasu Madhusudhana rao founded a *Khādi* centre in Vijayawada. Ponduru Khadi was famous all over India for its quality and softness. To encourage the use and sale of Swadeshi goods they used to conduct Swadeshi *santalu* (fairs)

The leaders utilized the Sankranti festival to boycott foreign goods. Sankranti festival was celebrated by *bhogi mantalu* (bonfire) in which collected foreign goods from the people set fire to the goods and go around the it by singing songs like "*seema guttalu unte bhumilona penta*". (Foreign goods are like garbage) The prohibition which was a constrictive programme was very successful throughout Andhra especially in Kurnool district. When Government initiated auction for taddy trees to extract the liquor (kallu), no one was participated in the auction of liquor.¹⁴

Cheerala-perala Struggle:

One of the glorious of episodes in the freedom movement in Andhra was the Cheerala-perala struggle. Cheerala-perala are two neighbouring villages consist of fifteen thousands of population. In 1919 the Madras government constituted the villages of Cheerala-Perala in to municipality. Congress party gave many representations to revoke the municipality but was refused. Duggirala Gopalakrishnayya started a no tax campaign and organized a volunteer corps called '*Ramadandu*'. When Gopalakrishnayya met Gandhiji, he advised to evacuate the houses so that the municipality would disappear automatically.

The people followed his adviced literally and evacuated their houses on April 26, 1921 mid-night which was described as '*Mahabhinishkramanam*' in Buddhism (Buddha left home in quest of knowledge) The people settle down the outskirts of the village by constituting a new township called 'Ramnagar' in the name of lord Rama.¹⁵

Salt Satyagraha:

On the 6th April, 1930 Gandhiji began his campaign of civil disobedience by setting out to Dandi with 78 followers to break the laws regarding the production of salt. Erneni Subramanyam, a Telugu origin followed Gandhiji to the march. Konda Venkatappaya appointed as the dictator for the entire Andhra region. In Andhra many *sibirams* were founded to made salt at places like Sita nagaram asramam in East Godavari, Eluru, Vijayawada, Machilipattanam, Guntur, Bellary.

Women also participated in a large scale with the call of Mahatma Gandhi. Duvvuru Subbamma being the first *satyāgrahi*, Unnava Lakshmibayamma and Rukmini Lakshmiapati founded a '*mahila swayamsevikā sangham*' to spread the ideals of the movement. Unnava Lakshmibayamma played remarkable role who is responsible in motivating the women in the freedom movement and ther by started taking processions in Guntur district that celebrated traditions and

heritage and attracted the women of the district, On the day of Ugadi festival, 1st April, 1930 Unnava Lakshmibayamma requested all the women in the town to participate in *satyāgraha* movement by observing *swarajyalakshmi vratam*.¹⁶ In that evening women sing national songs, go around the town to encourage women to participate in the movement. This vratam played an essential role in mobilizing the women folk in the national movement in Andhra¹⁷

It is a tradition to hold *Rathōstavam* on the occassion of Sri 'Venkateswra *kalyānam*' which is held every year in Chinnavada village, East Godavari district. During the *Rathōstavam* held in 1931 the villagers decided to place the photos of Gandhiji, Nehru, Sarojini Naidu and national try colour flag on the chariot¹⁸. The trustees of the temple have informed the government and obtained the permission also. But when the procession was moving the police stopped the chariot which resulted in riots.

Quit India:

In the light of the outbreak of World War II in 1939, the British government declared that India also participating in the World war. The congress ministers resigned from the offices in 1939 as a protest to the British declaration of India's participation in the second world war. The Japanese attacked on Visakhapattanam and Kakinada in Andhra on April 6, 1942. Gandhiji announced Quit India movement on 9 August, 1942. British government arrested all the leaders and imprisoned them. The Andhra state congress committee anticipated that such a move would be adopted by the government, and cautiously the state congress committee issued a circular ten days before the meting of the all India congress committee in Bombay. The circular was prepared by Kala venkatarao on July 29, 1942. It was approved by the congress committee and were sent to all the Andhra PCC offices. The circular contained a six-stage non-violent program. The prohibitory orders, complete abstinence from government institutions, initiating a strike of railway and factory workers. the picketeing before foreign goods and toddy shops and in the fifth and sixth stages consisted of ten kinds of activities, which involved cutting telegraph lines, non-payment of taxes, and hoisting Congress flags on government buildings. But it was only in the Kurnool Pradesh Congress Office, the complete circular was found in the police search. Hence it is popularly called as 'The Kurnool circular'¹⁹ in the freedom movement of India.

CONCLUSION

If we observe the Indian society of 1920's there was no alternative, but mixing of religious and moral principles with political concepts to create awareness among the people. Comparing freedom struggle as *dharma pōratam* (righteous war) attracted people well and brought them into the freedom struggle. Describing India as Bhramatamata also achieved a sense of brotherhood among the Indians.

Andhra leaders used religious gatherings like *Pushkaras* and teach people about patriotism with various stories from Hindu mythology. Because of that, the freedom struggle became a mass movement and even the illiterates, children and all sections of people participated in the freedom struggle.

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